SU's News

Research and scholarship in the news

Inadequate Compensation

William Johnson, professor of health economics, and graduate student Edward Heler (now teaching at Indiana University, Gary) have conducted, at SU, the first study of compensation received by the survivors of workers' who died as a result of workplace exposure to asbestos.They found the compensation received by the survivors was neither adequate in amount nor equitably distributed.

News of Johnson's study has appeared in *Business Insurance, Asbestos Litigation Reporter, Mealey's Litigation Reports,* and the *Syracuse Post-Standard.* Johnson has also been interviewed by the *Wall Street Journal,* the *New Yorker,* and *60 Minutes.*

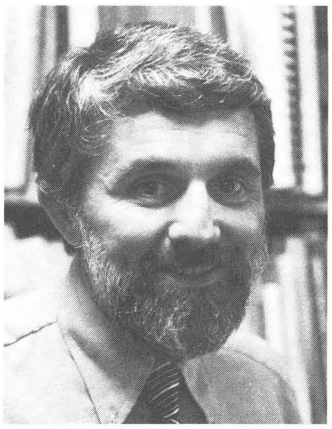
Johnson and Heler's figures are based on asbestos-related deaths that occurred among 17,800 men who were members of the International Association of Heat and Frost Insulators and Asbestos Workers, AFL-CIO, CLC, in 1967.

During 1979 the 249 widows surveyed lost a total of $3,401,094 based on the income their husbands would have earned were they still alive. Half of the widows received no compensation at all.

Worker's compensation was received by only 39 of the widows. Johnson told the *Post-Standard's* Barbara Shelly that most of the widows he surveyed did not even apply for worker's compensation. "Some told him they assumed they wouldn't receive any money," Shelly wrote. "Others didn't realize they were eligible to apply. 'For some, it was simply too painful,' Johnson said."

"The authors conclude that those who benefitted from asbestos production—including asbestos producers—are, in effect, being subsidized by asbestos workers and their survivors," reported Stephen Tarnoff in *Business Insurance.*

"Whether one wishes to measure social goals in terms of economic efficiency, morality, or some common-sense definition of what is just, compensation that fails to pay even the net loss to the survivors of dead workers is grossly inadequate," the researchers told Tarnoff.



William Johnson says asbestos victims deserve more.

A Taxing Competition

The Citizenship Education Conference, sponsored by the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, is held each year to help gifted high school seniors learn more about public policy issues and to help them strengthen their abilities to analyze such issues; it also functions as an SU scholarship competition. When the conference was held this spring on the theme, "Improving the Fairness and/or Efficiency of Our Tax System," it received front-page coverage in the *Wall Street Journal* both before and after the event.

The competition drew 172 high school students from states along the Eastern seaboard, and from Montana, Texas, and California; all were among the top 10 percent of SU's incoming freshman class. During their day-long stay at SU, they competed for scholarships while debating proposals for tax reform.

The *Wall Street Journal's* Scott Schmedel reported that more than 40 percent of the participants favored variations on a flat tax. A survey of students and parents attending the conference indicated that students were in favor of a flatter rate income tax system than were parents, and parents thought the chances of a major tax reform were less likely than did students.

Participants were evaluated on the basis of their proposals, technique, factual knowledge presented, and the quality of their oral presentations. Susan Crandall of Stoughton, Mass., won a $2,000 scholarship for distinction. Scholarships for excellence ($1,000) were won by Victoria Smith of Hauppauge, N.Y., and Elizabeth Sykes of Schenectady, N.Y. In addition, twenty-two $500 scholarships for achievement were awarded. The scholarships are renewable for four years of undergraduate study at any school or college at SU.

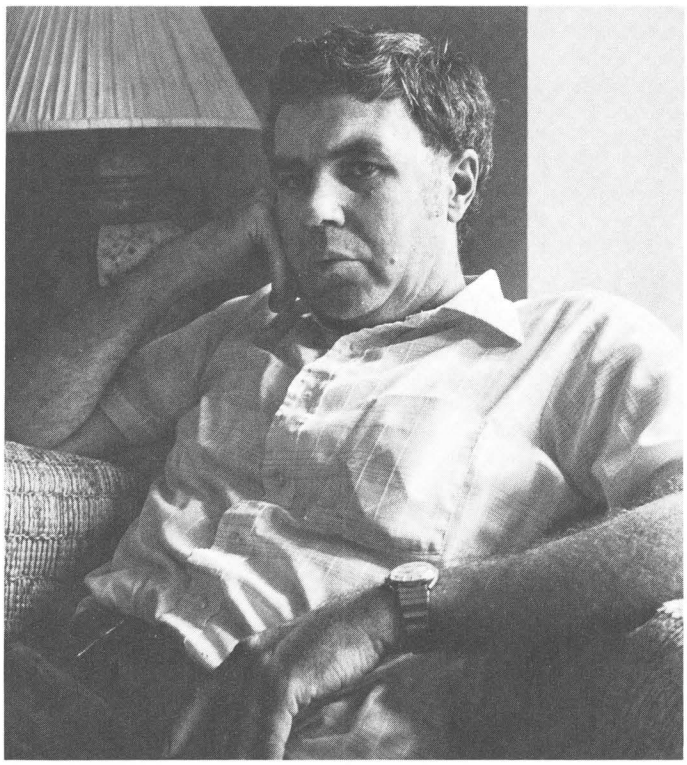
An interesting footnote: reports in the *Wall Street Journal* prompted calls from *USA Today* and the U.S. Treasury Department, which requested information on the students' responses for use in a speech by the Secretary of the Treasury.

Carving a Niche

Raymond Carver, professor of English on leave from the creative writing program, was featured this summer in a profile in *The New York Times Sunday Magazine,* written by Bruce Weber and subtitled "A Chronicler of Blue-Collar Despair."

In 1983, Carver was awarded a Mildred and Harold Strauss Livings stipend, a five-year annual sum of $35,000 from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. Weber reported that Carver is now spending the bulk of his time writing poetry, rather than the short stories for which he has become famous. Included in the *Times* piece was a new poem by Carver titled "My Dad's Wallet."

Carver has not always made his living as a writer. Weber reports that before he landed his first white-collar job as editor at a Palo Alto textbook firm, Carver picked tulips, pumped gas, swept hospital



The "skillful, quiet voice" of Raymond Carver, professor of English on leave from SU, was featured in The New York Times.

Stephen Webb has seeded a "rethinking" of American history.

corridors, swabbed toilets, and managed an apartment complex.

That may help to explain why "Carver's stories are populated by characters who live in America's shoddy enclaves of convenience products and conventionality—people who shop at Kwik-Mart and who live in saltbox houses or quickly built apartment complexes. They don't seem to want much: ordinarily divided lives of work and home, food on the table, love and solace when they need them. They yearn for serenity rather than achievement."

"The influence of Carver's skillful, quiet voice is being felt by a generation of still unpublished writers," Weber wrote. "According to Tom Jenks, who edits fiction at *Esquire,* 'The style most often attempted by young writers is one marked by short, hard-edged sentences, like those of Ray Carver, and the subject matter often brushes up against Carver's as well—representative of what I would call a downside neo-realism.' "

Carver told Weber: "If I write a story and someone connects up with it in some way, is moved by it and reminded of his humanness, then I'm happy. What more can I want? It's important to do the work because somebody needs to do it. It's important to be reminded that we're human. I know I make more of it than I should, but I think it's a noble undertaking, this business. It sure beats a lot of other things I can think of."

In a letter to *The Times* a few weeks after the article appeared, Joyce Rutter wrote, "I'm glad Raymond Carver has a stipend to write, but, as an undergraduate at Syracuse University, I wish he'd hurry back."

Rethinking History

"There has already been talk among historians of having to rewrite history books if Stephen S. Webb's version of the American Revolution turns out to be correct," wrote Elizabeth Wasserman this summer in the *Syracuse Post-Standard.*

Initiating the controversy was *1676: The End of American Independence,* Webb's latest book and the subject of a full-page feature in *The New York Times Review of Books.*

"In *1676,* Stephen Saunders Webb, a professor of history at Syracuse University and the author of *The Governors General: The English Army and the Definition of Empire, 1569-1681,* tells us American Independence was all over a fall 100 years sooner than we had thought it started," wrote William S. McFeely in *The Times.*

"Webb's central thesis," Wasserman reported, "is that the semi-autonomous colonies lost much of their independence in 1676 and became part of an English empire that was as militaristic and imperialistic as the Roman empire."

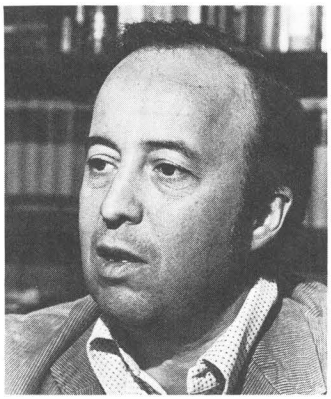
1676 upsets conventional opinions because of its implications for the history of the 1776 revolution (Was it independence or an empire of their own that the patriots sought?); the Constitution (Were the shades of English kings, asked McFeely, sitting at George Washington's shoulder?); and present policy (Does empire come naturally, even inevitably, to Americans because of our imperial origins?).

Concluded McFeely: *"1676,* brilliantly controversial, will invite a rethinking of the whole stretch of our American past."

Computer Crashes

Robert Morris, research coordinator of SU's Communications Studies Laboratory, was recently conducting psychokinesis experiments to determine whether people could influence computerized random-number generators. He was forced to abort the study, however, when the computer crashed for 13 of the first 33 test subjects.

After comparing the crash results with attitude questionnaires, Morris was led to a separate, unanticipated, and still preliminary hypothesis: Individuals who grow



Arnold Goldstein battles aggression.

nervous in the presence of computers may, without realizing it, psychokinetically sabotage them.

"Our numbers are quite small," Morris explained, "so either this is a statistical aberration of some sort and there is really nothing here, or else we have blundered into something quite important." Either way, Morris' notion was intriguing enough that *Omni, Computerworld,* and the Newhouse News Service all reported it last spring.

According to Sally Squires, writing for the Newhouse News Service, Morris believes that computer crashes may be "due in part to a self-fulfilling prophecy: Those who fear computers may destine themselves to failure, if for no other reason than not bothering to read instructions carefully.

"But Morris' . . . studies also suggest another phenomenon at work—those anxious people may generate some kind of signal that interferes with computer operations."

Wrote SU alumnus Patrick Huyghe in *Omni:* "The age of technology is not welcomed by all. Many people repeatedly encounter some quite serious and inexplicable difficulties in their interactions with machines and electronic equipment. Computers crash in their presence, copying machines jam up, watches stop functioning, and telephones won't work."

Despite so much attention, Morris keeps his work in perspective. "[Morris] cautioned," wrote John Desmond of *Computerworld,* "that the possible power of mind over matter should not be overestimated: 'There is no real evidence from our anecdotes that there are any budding superstars—people who can snap their fingers and make the Pentagon's lights go out.' "

Keeping the Peace

After spending two days on campus in mid-June, Associated Press newsfeatures writer John Barbour completed a detailed account of work done by the Center for Research on Aggression. Barbour interviewed Arnold P. Goldstein, director of the center, and Marshall Segall, professor of social and political psychology, on the underpinnings of violence in our society.

"Aggression is complex in its causes, and so has to be complex in its solutions," Goldstein told Barbour. "In [1981] . . . 11,500 Americans were killed by bullets, as compared with only 8 in Great Britain, 42 in West Germany, 49 in Japan, and 52 in Canada."

Segall noted that 9 times out of 10, violent killers are males. "Compensatory machoism is an American cultural trait," he told Barbour. "We have produced a society in which there is great pressure on males to continually prove themselves. Much teaching in our society, including the role-modeling in TV and movie fiction, reinforces the view that if males don't get what they want, or if life has been unfair, they should go out and get even by beating up, even killing, other people."

"The center draws on the expertise of about a dozen faculty members of different disciplines at Syracuse University, seven members of the community concerned with violent acts or settings, including the New York State Department of Health, a local child abuse center, and the Syracuse police department, not to mention the FBI," Barbour wrote.

Its members "help train people all over the country in methods of coping with juvenile delinquents, child abusers, wife beaters, convicts—all sorts of people who engage in aggression."

"Skills for dealing with stress," Barbour wrote, "include making or answering a complaint, dealing with embarrassment, dealing with being left out, standing up for a friend, responding to failure, responding to persuasion, dealing with group pressure."

Goldstein will continue his war on aggression this fall, as he tests a new program called ART—Aggression Reduction Training—with residents at the Division for Youth facility in Annsville, N.Y.